

7.0 COMMENTS AND COORDINATION

Public involvement along the US 8 corridor began with the formation of the US 8 Coalition in 1994 and has continued to grow through the study process. The Coalition was instrumental in working with WisDOT to formulate the US 8 EIS study as a planning project. This section of the DEIS summarizes the project's public and agency involvement, including meetings and workshops, other communications, and agency correspondence. Table 7.1.5 includes summaries of various public involvement activities.

7.1 MEETINGS AND WORKSHOPS

7.1.1 Scoping Meetings

Two agency scoping meetings were held with local elected officials and federal and state agency officials. The first meeting was held September 20, 2001, at the Barron County Courthouse. The purpose of the meeting was to bring together officials that would be involved with the EIS to review the study corridor. A presentation was given on the study scope and activities already underway. Archaeological research was then presented, followed by a brainstorming session on corridor issues and concerns. At the end of the meeting, agency and local officials were invited to participate in a bus tour of the study corridor.

The second agency scoping meeting was held on September 26, 2002, at the Barron County Courthouse. The objective of this meeting was to reach consensus on the purpose and need of the project and to review the conceptual alternatives for the corridor.

7.1.2 Focus Groups

The study formed four separate focus groups to gather transportation-related concerns along US 8 in both Polk and Barron counties. For each county, there were two focus groups, one made up of local officials and the other made up of citizens and business owners/persons, resulting in a total of 50 members. The focus groups met on a monthly basis for six months in 2001 and reported their findings in January 2002. The US 8 focus groups identified many needs as they relate to the highway but many of these needs also exemplified the importance of local transportation systems and land use planning. The focus groups documented all of the identified needs in a summary report and listed safe access to and from the highway as their primary concern. In general, focus group members portrayed US 8 as a barrier to safe pedestrian and bicycle movements in the urban areas of Barron and Turtle Lake. Along the rural segments of US 8, the groups felt that the corridor warrants improvements because there are factors that are creating unsafe conditions. These factors include limited right-of-way and shoulder space, increasing traffic volumes, high speeds, and the mix of tourist/agricultural/truck vehicles.

7.1.3 Vision Workshops

To understand the specific transportation needs of US 8 in Turtle Lake and Barron, the study team hosted two public vision workshops in June 2002. One workshop was held in Barron and the other was held in Turtle Lake. Forty to fifty local participants attended each workshop. These workshops were an opportunity for individuals to participate directly in the future of their communities. The purpose of these workshops was to exchange information with local residents and businesses regarding problems they encountered in the transportation system in and



Figure 7.1.3-1 Vision Workshop

around the Barron and Turtle Lake areas. The study team also asked the participants to prioritize these problems. The participants brainstormed potential solutions to these problems as well as potential bypass locations. They performed a mapping exercise to identify these possible alternative bypass routes.

In Turtle Lake, the major concerns of participants were congested intersections, particularly the intersections of US 8/US 63/County T, US 8 and the casino, and US 8/US 63 North. They also listed pedestrian safety near the casino as another concern. In Barron, the major concerns of participants included too much traffic, congested intersections, unsafe pedestrian crossings, and the need for a passing lane between Poskin and Barron.

7.1.4 Public Meetings

A series of public information meetings garnered substantial feedback from property owners and the general public that improvements to US 8 are needed immediately. The first public meeting was held in April 2002 to introduce the study and the needs assessment. The study team presented conceptual alternatives at the second public information meeting in February of 2003. The main focus of the February 2003 meeting was to solicit comments from the communities concerning the alternatives. Many comments were received in the form of returned comment handouts, phone calls, verbal discussions, and letters. Residents were primarily concerned about the loss of property resulting from right-of-way acquisition, the effects of bypasses on communities, and environmental impacts associated with bypasses.

The study team held a third set of public meetings in June 2003 in Turtle Lake and Barron to clarify the through-town alternatives, present refinements to mainline alternatives, and to review the bypass alternatives around Turtle Lake and Barron. Additional comments regarding concerns with access, relocations, and impacts were received from these meetings. The study team also presented project updates in June 2003 to the Barron Kiwanis and a group of Turtle Lake business owners. A public meeting that focused on alternatives in the Deer Lake area was held in October 2003. Over 50 people attended the open house and presentation.

7.1.5 Local Project Office and Individual Meetings

In order to manage the numerous other meetings necessary to inform and coordinate with local agencies and governments, interested organizations, and individuals, a local project office was made available. Residents with questions or concerns were able to meet with a project representative based in Rice Lake. Additionally, numerous other meetings were held at various locations along the project corridor to inform and coordinate with local agencies and governments and interested organizations and individuals.

Table 7.1.5-1 summarizes project meetings with the public, agencies, and local officials.

**Table 7.1.5-1
US 8 EIS Meetings**

Meeting Event	Date	Topic
Operational Planning Meeting	July 30, 2001	Bring major players together, introduce team, project and schedule.
Focus Group Kick-off Meeting	September 19, 2001	Commence focus group process, distribute information.
Agency Scoping Meeting	September 20, 2001	Introduce project and review study corridor.
West Local Officials Focus Group Meeting Series	October 10, November 14, and December 12, 2001	Discuss corridor needs.
West Citizens/Business Focus Group Meeting Series	October 10, November 14, and December 12, 2001	Discuss corridor needs.
East Local Officials Focus Group Meeting Series	October 11, November 15, and December 13, 2001	Discuss corridor needs.
East Citizens/Business Focus Group Meeting Series	October 11, November 15, and December 13, 2001	Discuss corridor needs.
Focus Groups Presentation	January 10, 2002	Presentation of focus group reports.
Public Information Meeting	April 8, 2002	First PIM, review study information, present identified needs, take comments.
Turtle Lake Vision Workshop	June 3, 2002	Discuss corridor issues and conceptualize alternatives.
Barron Vision Workshop	June 4, 2002	Discuss corridor issues and conceptualize alternatives.
Agency Scoping Meeting	September 26, 2002	Achieve consensus on purpose and need and review conceptual corridor alternatives.
Local Officials Meeting	November 18, 2002	Review OD studies and bypass alternatives.
Deer Lake Conservancy Meeting	December 19, 2002	Discuss DLC, stormwater runoff issues, and wetland restoration potential.
Public Information Meeting	February 20, 2003	Review traffic and crash information and bypass and mainline alternatives.
US 8 Coalition Meeting	March 19, 2003	Study update and review of project concerns.
Meeting with DATCP	April 3, 2003	Study overview and review of alternatives.
Local Officials Meeting	April 29, 2003	Study update and review of access and land use issues.
Secondary and Cumulative Land Use Impacts Workshop	May 15, 2003	Facilitated workshop with agency and local government representatives to review methods of evaluation.
Turtle Lake Business Meeting	June 4, 2003	Study update and review alternatives, address questions and concerns.
Turtle Lake Public Information Meeting	June 4, 2003	Study update and review alternatives, address questions and concerns.
Barron Kiwanis Club Meeting	June 11, 2003	Study update and review alternatives.
Barron Public Information Meeting	June 11, 2003	Study update and review alternatives, address questions and concerns.
Lower Turtle Lake Association Meeting	June 14, 2003	Study overview and review of alternatives.
Meeting with DATCP	July 9, 2003	Review purpose and need and alternatives' modifications.
Village of Turtle Lake Meeting	July 16, 2003	Gather oral/written testimony on Turtle Lake Alternatives.
Meeting with WDNR	July 18, 2003	Review alternatives with respect to natural resource impacts
Meeting with WDNR	August 15, 2003	Review alternatives with respect to impacts to threatened and endangered species.
Town of St. Croix Falls and Town of Balsam Lake Meeting	September 22, 2003	Study update and review alternatives.

Meeting Event	Date	Topic
Deer Lake Conservancy Meeting	September 23, 2003	Present and discuss Deer Lake Alternatives
Barron Expert Panel Meeting Series	September 23, October 20, and November 18, 2003	Reviewed potential secondary and cumulative effects as a result of study alternatives, mitigation tool possibilities.
Town of Apple River and Town of Beaver Meeting	September 29, 2003	Review alignments and study progress.
Turtle Lake Expert Panel Meeting Series	September 29, October 13, and November 10, 2003	Reviewed potential secondary and cumulative effects as a result of study alternatives, mitigation tool possibilities.
Meeting with DATCP	October 16, 2003	Review potential corridor relocation concepts in Polk County as suggested by WDNR.
Deer Lake Public Information Meeting	October 22, 2003	Overview of study and Deer Lake area alternatives and public comment.
VE Study	November 3-7, 2003	Value Engineering Study
Meeting with Army Corps of Engineers	November 13, 2003	Discuss purpose and need and range of alternatives
Barron County Soil and Water Conservation Department Meeting	November 19, 2003	Review study alternatives and possible impacts.
Polk County Land and Water Resources Department Meeting	November 19, 2003	Review study alternatives and possible impacts.
US 8 Coalition Meeting	December 15, 2003	Review and rate proposed alternatives.
Phone Conference Meeting with WDNR	March 19, 2004	Review study alternatives
Meeting with DNR	June 17, 2004	Review study alternatives and comments
US 8 Coalition Meeting	January 9, 2006	Provide overview of Tier EIS approach

7.2 OTHER COMMUNICATIONS

7.2.1 Transportation Needs Survey

In 2001, approximately 8,000 Transportation Needs surveys were included in a US 8 EIS newsletter mailing to residents and businesses along the corridor. The survey elicited a 25 percent response rate with nearly 2,000 responses. Of the respondents, 89 percent consider it difficult to pass slow-moving vehicles on US 8, and 93 percent consider it difficult to turn left onto or cross US 8. Over half of the respondents stated that the corridor improvement most needed is to increase capacity on US 8. The top two concerns in both the Village of Turtle Lake and the City of Barron were the need for turn lanes and traffic congestion at intersections. Respondents indicated that Barron's third most important concern is nonlocal truck traffic and Turtle Lake's third most important concern is the need for more signalized intersections. The survey also asked that respondents name specific intersections or segments along the corridor they feel are not safe or need improvement. The intersections listed most frequently include the US 63 (S)/County T, US 63 (N)/Maple Street, and WIS 35 (N) intersections with US 8. Respondents also listed the Turtle Lake Casino entrance with US 8 as an intersection that needs improvement. The Transportation Needs surveys clearly identified that area residents and US 8 travelers seek improvements to the US 8 corridor.

7.2.2 Project Newsletters

To date, seven newsletters have been sent to residents in the project corridor. These newsletters were sent out in August 2001, March 2002, January 2003, September 2003, March 2004, August 2004, and May 2005. This correspondence informed residents of the study progress, invited participation in workshops and public meetings, and provided project contact information.

7.2.3 Project Web Site

WisDOT hosted a Web site to provide information and updates on the US 8 EIS project. The Web site address is <<http://www.dot.state.wi.us/projects/d8/eis/index.htm>>. The information provided on-line includes a general overview, project newsletters, project purpose and need, project schedule, corridor maps, public involvement summaries, alternatives summaries, and contact information.

7.2.4 Toll-Free Telephone Number

A toll-free telephone number to the consultant's office was established for use by the public to submit comments, voice concerns, and ask questions. The phone number has been heavily publicized throughout the study process to encourage public comment.

7.2.5 Public Correspondence

Comment sheets have been incorporated in public handouts and newsletters. These sheets have provided an avenue for individuals to communicate with the project team. Numerous response letters and phone calls have been written and made to interested individuals in response to questions raised in public meetings or elsewhere. Generally these letters have provided specific information requested by the individual.

7.3 AGENCY AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT CORRESPONDENCE

At the beginning of the project, letters were sent to all applicable state and federal agencies requesting their early scoping comments and their concerns in determining critical issues for the corridor. As the study alternatives were developed, agencies were kept informed and asked for input. Continued correspondence occurred with the agencies to coordinate project meetings and respond to their concerns. State and local officials were also kept abreast of the study progress. Many local governments submitted suggestions or resolutions supporting particular alternatives.

This section includes the following correspondence with agencies, organizations, and local governments:

Agency, Organization, or Government Unit	Correspondence Type	Date
Lac Du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians	Interest in project (letter)	August 14, 2001 and Sept. 10, 2003
Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma	No comments on project (letter)	August 21, 2001 and October 1, 2002 and January 2, 2002
Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin	Interest in project (letter)	August 22, 2001 and February 1, 2002
Forest County Potawatomi Community	Interest in project (letter)	September 5, 2001 and December 10, 2001
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources	General comments (e-mail)	November 1, 2001
Highway 8 Coalition	Meeting minutes	September 19, 2002
Town of Beaver	Position (letter)	April 15, 2003
Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection	General comments (letter)	May 7, 2003
City of Barron	Position (meeting minutes)	July 8, 2003
Business Owners – City of Barron	* Signed petition opposing realignment of existing US 8 in Barron	Not dated
Business Owners – Turtle Lake Area	* Signed petition opposing realignment of existing US 8 in the Turtle Lake area	July 12, 2003
Town of Almena	position (letter)	July 14, 2003
Village of Turtle Lake	Request for detailed in-town route map showing proposed access changes (letter)	July 17, 2003
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources	Alignments comments (letter)	August 14, 2003
FHWA	NEPA/404 merge process letter to COE, USEPA and USFWS agencies to review project Purpose and Need	Draft letter dated August 14, 2003 (included). Final letter was dated August 23, 2003 (no copy available)
Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation Government Center	No comments on project (letter)	September 9, 2003
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Bureau of Endangered Resources	General comments (letter)	September 19, 2003
U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service	Purpose and need and alternatives comments (letter)	September 25, 2003
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 5	Purpose and need and alternatives comments (letter)	September 29, 2003
U.S. Department of the Army, St. Paul District, Corps of Engineers	Purpose and need and alternatives comments (letter)	September 29, 2003
Town of Apple River	Position (meeting minutes)	October 13, 2003
Polk County Land and Water Resources Department	Position (letter)	October 22, 2003
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources	Purpose and need and alternatives comments (letter)	October 23, 2003
Town of St. Croix Falls	Request for project information	November 4, 2003

Agency, Organization, or Government Unit	Correspondence Type	Date
Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection	General comments (letter)	November 5, 2003
Town of Balsam Lake	Resolution (letter)	November 18, 2003
Town of Beaver	Resolution (letter)	December 9, 2003
Town of Clinton	Position (meeting minutes)	December 9, 2003
City of Barron	Position (letter)	December 18, 2003
St. Croix Tribal Center	Memorandum to Tribal Council	January 28, 2004
Village of Turtle Lake	Position (letter) and meeting minutes	January 29, 2004
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources	4(f) and 6(f) information (e-mail)	February 5, 2004
Sac & Fox Nation of Missouri in Kansas & Nebraska	Interest in project (letter)	March 11, 2004
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources	Section 4(f) considerations (letter)	March 22, 2004
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources	Section 4(f) considerations (letter)	March 29, 2004
Town of St. Croix Falls	General comments	April 8, 2004
City of Barron	Updated position (letter)	April 19, 2004
Polk County Highway Department (US 8 Coalition)	Position (letter)	May 6, 2004
City of Barron	Map showing City's revised Alternative A	May 10, 2004
FHWA	Formal request to COE to be cooperating agency (letter)	June 14, 2004
City of Barron	Minutes of Common Council – endorsed support of revised Alt. A	July 26, 2004
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources	Section 4(f) considerations (letter)	August 16, 2004
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (Bureau of Air Management)	No air pollution control permit is required (letter)	January 7, 2005
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources	Section 4(f) and 6(f) considerations (letter)	March 21, 2005
Wisconsin Department of Transportation	Architecture/history survey information to SHPO (letter)	October 14, 2005
FHWA	NEPA/404 merge process letter to USEPA to request review of Tier EIS concept in relation to Purpose and Need and response to previous comments from agency (letter)	November 9, 2005
FHWA	NEPA/404 merge process letter to COE to request review of Tier EIS concept in relation to Purpose and Need and response to previous comments from agency (letter)	November 9, 2005
FHWA	NEPA/404 merge process letter to USFWS to request review of Tier EIS concept in relation to Purpose and Need (letter)	November 9, 2005
WisDOT Bureau of Aeronautics	Comment letter on Barron alternatives (letter)	November 10, 2005
U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service	Purpose and need and alternatives comments (letter)	December 9, 2005
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 5	Purpose and need and alternatives comments (letter)	December 20, 2005
U.S. Department of the Army, St. Paul District, Corps of Engineers	Purpose and need and alternatives comments (letter)	December 21, 2005
State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Division of Historic Preservation	* Certified Determination of Eligibility (DOE) Forms	March 24, 2006

Copies of the correspondence follow with the exception of those items marked with a “*”.